

CALIFORNIA DUNGENESS CRAB FISHING GEAR WORKING GROUP

March 29, 2019

The California Dungeness Crab Fishing Gear Working Group (Working Group) is a diverse, multi-stakeholder collaboration united by a shared goal to support thriving whale populations along the West Coast and a thriving and profitable Dungeness crab fishery. Established in September 2015, the Working Group is a unique coalition of commercial and recreational fishermen, environmental organization representatives, members of the whale entanglement response network, and state and federal agencies committed to identifying solutions that reduce the risk of whale entanglements in Dungeness crab fishing gear.

On March 26, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, together with the Center of Biological Diversity and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, [announced a settlement](#) to protect whales and sea turtles from entanglement in commercial Dungeness crab gear. The Working Group was not a party in this litigation or the settlement terms. Moving forward, the Working Group understands they will have a role in advising the state in the evaluation of entanglement risk using the [Risk Assessment and Mitigation Program \(RAMP\)](#), which is a core foundational component of the settlement agreement.

On March 19, 2019, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Ocean Protection Council, convened the Working Group's Evaluation Team to proactively discuss and assess the relative risk of entanglements following reports of increased humpback whale concentrations (a risk evaluation summary is [available here](#)). In light of changing events based on the settlement agreement, the Working Group will pause on recommending any additional management action for the commercial fishery during the 2018-19 season.

[The Working Group encourages recreational Dungeness crab fishermen and commercial and recreational fishermen engaged in other fixed gear fisheries to review the \[March 19 risk assessment\]\(#\) and consider fishing as minimal gear as possible to reduce vertical lines in the water. It is also strongly advised to avoid fishing in areas where there are groups of feeding or migrating whales, schools of anchovy, and/or swarms of krill during the spring and summer months.](#)

The Working Group remains committed to continuing to address this pressing and complex issue through further developing the RAMP and working collaboratively with the state and its federal partners throughout the Incidental Take Permit/Habitat Conservation Plan development process. The Working Group will continue to track the RAMP and conduct future risk evaluations to inform recommendations to the Director in advance of and during the 2019-20 California Dungeness crab fishing season.

A request for nominations for new Working Group participants is expected to be available in April. Fishermen and whale watch operators are encouraged to participate in a pilot project testing solar loggers as a tool to help gather enhanced fishing dynamics and whale concentration information. Fishermen are also welcome to participate in gear innovation testing that is underway. To learn more about these opportunities, or to be added to the Working Group's public email list, please contact info@cawhalegroup.com.

Information about the Working Group's efforts, including opportunities to provide feedback and contribute expertise to the issue of whale entanglements: www.opc.ca.gov/whale-entanglement-working-group & www.opc.ca.gov/risk-assessment-and-mitigation-program-ramp.